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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 10 TEL AVIV 000535

SIPDIS

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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
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HQ USAF FOR XOX
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USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
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COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
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PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- 11. Mideast
- 12. Muhammad Cartoon Controversy
- 13. Iran: Nuclear Program

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that FM Tzipi Livni, who leaves for the U.S. today, will meet with Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley. The radio reported that Livni will also meet with King Abdullah II of Jordan and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The station noted that The New York Times called her a "most unusual Israeli politician."

Israel Radio quoted Acting PM Ehud Olmert as saying this morning at a conference organized by The Marker, Ha'aretz's business section, that it is not in Israel's interest to harm PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas as long as he refrains from collaborating with Hamas and as long as the PA does not have a Hamas government. Olmert was quoted as saying that Israel will cooperate with Abbas in order to strengthen elements that recognize Israel's right to exist within secure borders. Olmert was also quoted as saying that Israel will not play into the hands of extremists who want a never-ending war and terror. Ha'aretz led with a report that Abbas told Israel recently that he will continue to be responsible for diplomatic contacts with Jerusalem despite Hamas's victory in the PA's parliamentary elections, and that he requested that Israel continue this dialogue rather than ignoring him as "irrelevant." Ha'aretz wrote that Olmert responded that in that case, Israel will continue talking with Abbas for the time being. The newspaper reported that Abbas's envoys stressed that the PLO, and not the PA, is the body that has signed all previous agreements with Israel and is officially responsible for conducting diplomatic negotiations, and that since Abbas is also chairman of the PLO, he intends to continue negotiating with Israel in this capacity. Abbas was also quoted as saying said that he intends to try to regain control over both the PA's security services and its budget. Both responsibilities were taken away from Abbas's predecessor, Yasser Arafat, and transferred to other Palestinian officials under pressure from Israel and the U.S.

The media reported that on Sunday, Olmert ordered the Finance Ministry to give the PA 249.7 million shekels (around USD 53 million) in indirect taxes that Israel collects on the PA's behalf. Olmert had delayed the transfer for a few days in response to Hamas's electoral victory. However, Olmert was quoted as saying that from now on, the monthly transfers will not be made automatically; instead, the government will reexamine the situation each month and make a decision. He assigned Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz to conduct the monthly assessment on whether to transfer the tax money, but Mofaz will consult with Olmert before making

a final decision.

Israel Radio quoted Mousa Abu Marzuk, the deputy head of Hamas's political bureau, as saying in Cairo that Hamas will abide by the agreements signed between the PA and Israel, except for those that harm the interests of the Palestinian people. Abu Marzuk was also quoted as saying that his organization does not intend to recognize Israel. The Jerusalem Post quoted PA Acting Finance Minister Jihad Wazir as saying that if Hamas did not change its ideology, the PA would collapse for lack of funds.

All media reported that a 22-year-old Palestinian man from the Nablus area stabbed a woman to death and wounded four people on Sunday morning in an attack on passengers of a Petah Tikva minibus taxi service. The assailant was arrested. During the weekend, all media reported that on Friday afternoon, a Qassam rocket landed outside a trailer-villa occupied by Gush Katif evacuees in Kibbutz Carmiya, injuring a seven-month-old baby and his father while they were napping. The IDF responded with artillery fire into the Gaza Strip. Today, all media quoted Palestinian officials as saying that Israeli missiles hit two cars carrying Islamic Jihad militants in Gaza City last night, killing two senior militants and badly injuring several others. Media reported that the IAF also hit and killed three Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades activists in Gaza on Sunday morning. The media reported that the IDF confirmed carrying out the double air strike. On Sunday, all media reported that the International Atomic Energy Agency decided on Saturday to refer Iran's nuclear program to the UN Security Council.

All media reported that tens of thousands of right-wing demonstrators rallied in Jerusalem Sunday night, calling for a state commission of inquiry into the excessive use of force by police at the Arnona settlement outpost last week. The theme of the rally was "Olmert is bad for the Jews." In its lead story, Yediot quoted Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin as saying at Sunday's cabinet meeting that a settler is bound to fire at the security forces. Yediot reported that the popular right-leaning Internet web site rotter.net published a montage of Police Superintendent Moshe Karadi with a Nazi flag in the background.

In its lead story, Maariv reported that last week FM Tzipi Livni dispatched two of her senior aides to London to meet with senior Afghan officials.

Leading media reported that a Belgian-Islamic political organization, the Arab-European League, posted anti-Semitic cartoons on its web site on Saturday in response to the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad that appeared in a Danish newspaper last September. Leading media cited claims in Lebanon that the arson of the Danish Embassy in Beirut was directed from Damascus, and noted the apathy of the Syrian forces in Damascus during the attack on the Danish Embassy there.

During the weekend, all media reported on Sunday's capsizing in the Red Sea of the Egyptian ferry As-Salaam 98, which carried around 1,400 passengers, in which 1,000 people disappeared. Ha'aretz reported that Egypt turned down an aid offer from Israel.

All media reported that A-G Menachem Mazuz recently ordered the Interior Ministry to recognize the marriage of Yitzhak Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir and Larissa Trimbovler, despite the fact that the Justice Ministry had defined the marriage as "problematic."

Maariv quoted Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld as saying in an interview with the German newspaper Handelsblatt that the U.S. is not ruling a military response against Iran. Over the weekend, major media cited a call for unity in the fight against terrorism made by Rumsfeld on Saturday at the annual Munich security conference.

During the weekend, leading media reported that Hizbullah fired dozens of mortar shells and anti-tank missiles at anti-tank missiles at IDF posts in the Sheba Farms area. An IDF soldier was lightly wounded in the clashes. Leading media reported that in retaliation, the IAF hit Hizbullah positions in Lebanon.

Yediot reported that Israel's National Council for Planning and Construction is expected to approve on Tuesday the construction of a desalination plant in Hadera that will supply water to the PA.

Ha'aretz cited an announcement released by the Israeli

Health Ministry on Sunday, according to which the ministry and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently signed a first-of-its-kind memorandum of understanding on the exchange of information between the two bodies. The newspaper said that the agreement related to pharmaceuticals and medical equipment.

The Jerusalem Post cited the U.S. publication Defense News as saying over the weekend that Israel has signed a secret USD 350-million deal with India to develop and manufacture the long-range Barak anti-missile air defense system for both countries' militaries. The Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli defense sources refused to confirm the report but that they said Israel had signed several "large-scale" deals with various countries during the DEFEXPO arms exhibition in New Delhi last week.

Ha'aretz reported that Russia and Turkey announced last weekend that they are advancing plans to extend a Russian-Turkish gas pipeline to Israel.

On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post printed a Jewish Telegraphic Agency dispatch according to which American Jewish leaders are fighting lobbying reform efforts in the U.S. Congress.

I. Mideast:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "[The U.S. administration] is responding to long-term issues -- such as the fate of the Roadmap -- with a shrug."

Columnist Amos Gilboa wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Palestinian society has the potential for a counter-reaction against Hamas."

Conservative columnist Prof. Efraim Inbar, Director of the Begin-Sadat Strategic Center at Bar-Ilan University, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The Hamas ascendancy in Palestinian politics ... further calls into question the wisdom of the two-state paradigm."

Block Quotes:

I. "It's Currently Convenient For the U.S. Administration Not To Look For Answers"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 6): "Like everybody else, the {U.S.] administration was surprised by the results of the PA elections. But it continues to say that it isn't sorry about their having taken place. It is responding to long-term issues -- such as the fate of the Roadmap -- with a shrug. It says that it is clear that the Roadmap is based on a situation in which both sides can communicate and are interested in its progress. If it turns out that this is the situation, [the Roadmap] will have to be reassessed. 'Altogether,' says a senior U.S. official, 'I don't feel the need to hurry. One can wait and see. The time for new ideas and sophisticated proposals will come. What's important for the Americans is to present a united international front.' A senior administration official says that this is what the U.S. has been able to do."

II. "Still Not Hamastan"

Columnist Amos Gilboa wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 6): "The Palestinian Authority and Palestinian society are still not Hamastan; there is still a strong secular-national element in Palestinian society. In other words, Palestinian society has the potential for a counter-reaction against Hamas. It is impossible to conjecture how the situation will develop, but it is quite clear that if Fatah does not engage in real soul searching -- and it needs to do so -- and if Hamas is granted freedom of action (by the internal arena and the international community), then it will truly turn the PA into Hamastan in the future."

III. "Fatah-Hamas Cohabitation"

Conservative columnist Prof. Efraim Inbar, Director of the Begin-Sadat Strategic Center at Bar-Ilan University, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (February 5): "The Hamas ascendancy in Palestinian politics ... further calls into question the wisdom of the two-state paradigm -- a bad idea that is gradually losing its appeal. The exercise of Palestinian self-determination has put the Palestinians on a path of self-destruction by empowering Hamas, and also endangering their neighbors. It is empathy for the Palestinians that should ring the warning bells against a Palestinian state and encourage a serious search for alternative ways to manage the situation."

12. Muhammad Cartoon Controversy:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Neither European countries' fears of their Muslim minorities, the fear of terrorism by Al-Qaida zealots nor the anti-Jewish publications of the Arab states suffice to justify hurtful assaults on religion."

Veteran columnist Yaron London wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "While the West, after the wars of the Reformation, matured into the 'age of Enlightenment,' the Muslim world is still a backwards child."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Must 'understanding' invariably result in the abdication of Western values?"

Block Quotes:

I. "The Muslim Protest"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (February 6): "The violence that has accompanied the outbreaks of protest in the Arab and Muslim world against European countries in which caricatures of the prophet Muhammad were published deserves harsh denunciation. The torching of embassies, the commercial boycotts, the kidnappings, the beatings and certainly the calls for murdering the desecrators of Islam must be condemned. Nevertheless, it is impossible not to understand the feelings of insult among Muslims worldwide, including in the territories and in Israel. The West's preaching of the value of multiculturalism cannot be taken seriously if it does not include both religious and secular people, members of different communities, religious minorities and Muslims and Christians alike.... The Arab media, including the Palestinian press, publish an endless stream of cartoons, television series and books whose anti-Jewish character falls little short of the infamous caricatures and publications of the Nazi Der Sturmer. These publications should be unequivocally condemned. But neither European countries' fears of their Muslim minorities, the fear of terrorism by Al-Qaida zealots nor the anti-Jewish publications of the Arab states suffice to justify hurtful assaults on religion."

II. "Artistic Terror"

Veteran columnist Yaron London wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (February 6): "Why are other ideals, whatever they might be, not immune to debasement, whereas religious beliefs, all of which are part of the stupidest and most murderous set of beliefs devised by the human spirit, enjoys different treatment. The reason lies in their nature: the precepts of religion need no proof, and in the eyes of its adherents, there is no other truth. The moderation of a moderate religious person does not stem from his religion, but rather from the acceptance of the principles of secular humanism. While the West, after the wars of the Reformation, matured into the 'age of Enlightenment,' the Muslim world is still a backwards child. It is very frightening to quarrel with an overgrown, violent child, who attacks everyone around him whenever he is offended."

III. "The Prophet's Honor"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (February 6): "There are those who would argue that the controversy does not reflect a clash of

civilizations. Yet it is precisely this persistent refusal to acknowledge the obvious that weakens the cause of tolerance and liberty. Must 'understanding' invariably result in the abdication of Western values? If anyone wants to appreciate why the West views with such suspicion the weapons programs of Muslim states such as Iran, they need look no further than the intolerance Muslim regimes exhibit to these cartoons, and what this portends.... Globalism demands that points of contact between Islam and the West be multicultural havens, not flashpoints. For that to happen, tolerance must be a two-way street."

3. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Tehran will now have to pay the price of its partial and mendacious reports to the IAEA."

Bar-Ilan University Communications and Political Science Professor Eytan Gilboa, currently on sabbatical at the University of Southern California, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The United States, the world's only superpower, has no tools to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons."

Block Quotes:

I. "The Price of the Lie"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (February 5): "The resolution by the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency to report on Iran to the United Nations Security Council is an important step in the right direction. It is the most resolute step to be taken thus far in the effort to curb the Iranian nuclear threat.... Tehran will now have to pay the price of its partial and mendacious reports to the IAEA while breaking the international agreements it signed, and to be punished for throwing off the agreement with the European powers to delay its uranium enrichment activities. It is reasonable to assume that the threatening anti-Semitic declarations by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad illustrated for the international community the aggressive nature of the Iranian regime and its refusal to respect acceptable norms of behavior between nations.... Israel conducted a responsible policy that preferred international mobilization led by the U.S. to presenting the Iranian threat as purely an Israeli concern.... The wording that was agreed on, 'The solution to the Iranian issue would contribute to global nonproliferation efforts and to realizing the objective of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction,' does not immediately endanger the deterrent capability Israel has, which hinges on its nuclear image. It is a reminder that the international community is aware of the exceptional status of Israel as an 'ambiguous power,' and will not agree to it forever. However as long as Israel is exposed to threats and numerous regional sources negating its right to exist, it is clear -- obviously to the international community as well -- that Israel will not give up its deterrent capability."

II. "Without Teeth"

Bar-Ilan University Communications and Political Science Professor Eytan Gilboa, currently on sabbatical at the University of Southern California, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (February 5): "The United States, the world's only superpower, has no tools to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.... The naive Europeans believe that every conflict in the world, including the one between Saddam's regime and the U.S. and the one that continues between the Arabs and Israel, can be resolved by negotiations. The European attempt failed, and Bush can say 'I told you so' to his allies. The problem is that he has no better alternatives. Bush wants the Security Council to impose sanctions on Iran.... In any case, it will be a long time before sanctions are imposed, and during this time Iran can accelerate its nuclear program. A diplomatic failure in the UN ... leaves two problematic options: putting up with the nuclearization of Iran, with all that implies, or taking military action. The United States' trouble in Iraq, the lack of support at home for additional military measures in the Middle East, doubts regarding the ability to destroy all Iranian nuclear

installations and fear of violent responses reduce the probability that America will use military force in Iran.... It is very doubtful whether America and the West will be able to cope with a nuclear Iran, which they themselves describe as the most prominent threat to world peace."

JONES